

TOURO LAW JOURNAL OF RACE, GENDER, & ETHNICITY

MY 1L EXPERIENCE
IZOLDA ALIYEVA*

During the second semester of my first year in law school, I watched a movie called “The Paper Chase.” It is a fairly old movie but it is deemed a classic. Although I watched several movies during that time period, this movie in particular made an impression on me, and that impression was that I was not alone.

In the movie, the protagonist is a first year law student who is doing his best to receive the recognition he believes he deserves from his contracts professor. The film takes place at Harvard Law School, so the competition is fierce. However, the protagonist is determined to do whatever is necessary to succeed in contracts, even if it sometimes results in his humiliation. The reason why this movie is relevant is because I am not like that protagonist.

The contracts class is one of the most important courses in law school. It is a required doctrinal class for all law students. It is a subject that is tested on the Uniform Bar Exam. I cannot dispute its importance. After I finished my year with my contracts professor I realized something important. Law school demands the best of everyone but it does not demand excellence.

I cannot count the number of opportunities that I have let slip by because I assumed my performance would not be excellent. I was not able to distinguish the difference between failing because I did not try and failing for any other reason. I say ‘any other reason’ and not something more specific, because I have learned to believe that trying your best is the most important action anyone can take.

Whether you are a student or a practitioner, “due diligence” and “professionalism” are phrases that are thrown around in the classrooms and in the office or court house. Those phrases pertain to what the practice of law expects of you on a daily basis. Phrases like that resonate with people. It forces people to reflect. This scary yet revelatory experience gives people the opportunity to confront the issues from their past because they want a better future for themselves.

Friends often ask me about my experience in law school. They ask whether what I am studying is enjoyable and whether I like doing what I do. I have taken property, constitutional law, civil procedure courses and the question about enjoyment remains the hardest question to answer thus far. At times I find myself defending this profession when its integrity is challenged. My argument for this profession, that the study of law brings me sorrow as well as triumphs, is usually the most passionate defense I have so far. Explaining my passion can be challenging because I keep coming back to the questions I have been asked and the answers I have given. I keep questioning the sincerity of my answers and the emotional trace they leave in me.

Usually when a person experiences a break-up with a significant other, one of the questions he or she ponders is, “How can someone I love so much hurt me so bad?” Those people have never attended law school. My first year of law school tested my confidence in myself, my

* Juris Doctor, Touro College Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center.

perseverance, my resilience, and my conscientiousness. My 1L year made me question my ability to pursue what I began to love. I have learned that the worst thing I can do is not try. The best thing I can do is try and try again after failing.

Outside of my academic career I have begun to put more effort into my physical and my spiritual well-being. At times during my first year my faith was put to the test and so was my physical health. I noticed, however, that quitting after the first set back was like running in a circle and expecting to arrive at a new destination. It was a waste of time. I believe that if I sincerely decide to do something every fiber of my body will follow. As my high school Latin teacher used to tell me, "Once your heart is in it, the body will follow."

This assignment made me consider all of my regrets about law school. I am half way in and with sincerity I can say -- I am in it for the long haul. I am choosing to stay on track. I am not choosing it because I have invested time or money into preparing to join the legal profession. I am choosing this because the study of law has revealed traits in me that I did not know I had. Some are good and some I am not proud of. As I am getting older, I can feel some traits settling in and becoming part of my personality. Now is the time for me to reflect on how far I have come. I am not as impulsive and judgmental as I used be, nor am I as generous with my time as I once was.

If anyone should ask me whether they should pursue a career in this profession or whether I would advise them to give it a try or to at least to read up on what the overall student experience is like, I would advise them that should not give up on pursuing it simply because it is challenging. I would advise them to pursue something this challenging because they want the challenge. I believe that is the secret to success. The difference between the students who excel and those who engage in complaining and blame gaming have at least one trait that distinguishes them. Those who excel have a desire to challenge themselves.